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Peter Farrell

*University of Bolton*, [p.farrell@bolton.ac.uk](mailto:p.farrell@bolton.ac.uk)

Christopher Rogers

*Gleeds*

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# MEETING THE NEEDS OF MEMBERS IN UK CONSTRUCTION PROFESSIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Peter Farrell <sup>1</sup>, Christopher Rogers <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Bolton, Bolton, BL3 5AB.

<sup>2</sup> Gleeds, Cardinal House, St Mary's Parsonage, Manchester M3 2LY

E-mail: <sup>1</sup>P.Farrell@bolton.ac.uk

**ABSTRACT:** One element of work of UK construction professional institutions is to meet the needs of members. Local branches provide continuing professional development (CPD) and social events. CPD is increasingly important to business. Professional institutions have a responsibility to ensure that income is spent prudently. Some members are critical of the work of professional institutions, and question whether they get good value from subscriptions. A postal survey is undertaken of members of the Chartered Institute of Building in the Greater Manchester area. It aims to determine whether member needs are being met and to identify any areas where better service is possible. The sample size was 1 600 people, and 162 replies were received. The paper will report on statistical data, and use qualitative responses to give an insight into how members view their professional institutions. This work will be useful to construction professionals who are active in their institutions.

**Keywords** - communication, continual professional development, performance indicators, professional institutions

## 1. INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEMS

Data from the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) *inter-alia*, is used as the main focus to examine the needs of members in construction professional institutions. Construction clients expect a professional service in the delivery of projects. UK professional institutions guide individual members in the provision of this service. There is a perception that individual members and professional institutions need to do better, particularly in the area of CPD; the objective of the paper is to use an analytical approach to seek out points for action. A workforce that is up-to-date makes a significant contribution to the UK economy and to the well being of society.

### 1.1 Volunteers working for professional institutions

Whilst paid staff of institutions drive the main thrust of work, there is heavy reliance upon the voluntary work of members. Some members play very active parts in institution work, but it is arguably becoming more difficult as commercial pressure in the workplace intensifies. Much good work appears to be done by experienced members, who may be at a point in their careers where they can devote a greater proportion of their time to voluntary work. Younger volunteers are much valued for their new ideas and energy, but such people are hard to find given the additional burden of needing to establish themselves in companies, and they are often also trying to nurture young families/ maintain busy social lives.

### 1.2 Structure and funding

The resources of professional institutions are limited, the chief source of fund raising in most cases being member subscriptions (e.g. CIOB 64% - CIOB 2003). Professional institutions must use their revenue in pursuit of agreed objectives that are described in charters or articles.

The organisational structures of institutions will often include centralised boards or committees. Some objectives may be devolved to regional democracies (called Branches in the CIOB structure), based on geographical or political boundaries. Grants are given to these Branches to help meet the needs of members locally. Branches may seek sponsorship or embark on activities that raise funds. The prime functions that involve highest cost are usually related to CPD or social activities. These may be provided free of charge to members; non-members are often also welcomed. Some events may require payment of a fee, or members may subscribe to attend a series of events.

### **1.3 Performance measures**

There does not seem to be objective measures in widespread use to judge the success or otherwise of Branches. Successful Branches are those that are proactive in promoting institution objectives, whilst managing their finances prudently. Financial measures that can be used to measure the success of regions are difficult. End of year accounts should not show deficits; but there is also a responsibility not to show excessive surpluses which have arisen due to mere hoarding of headquarter grants. It is not clear whether cash reserves that increase year on year are accumulated by successful income generating events or by passive activity that is not meeting stated objectives. Similarly, it is not clear whether decreasing reserves (in the short term) are acceptable given the benefits derived, or whether such decreases are due to waste. Professional institutions are answerable to the Charities Commission for the prudent management of their finances.

### **1.4 Involving members and CPD**

Participation rates in institutional activities are low. Some members may consciously maintain their membership merely as a passport to the next employment opportunity, and constantly reflect on whether they receive good value from their subscriptions. Members often remark 'my professional institution has never done anything for me'. It is difficult for institutions to carry benefits to members; more the case that benefits are made available and it is up to members to be proactive to make best use of them.

Increasing participation rates in CPD is an industry objective (CIC, 2003). European Union directive COM (2002) 119 about the recognition of professional qualifications, stresses the importance of life long learning. In the context of recent significant financial scandals, professional institutions and businesses must be increasingly vigilant in ensuring their members/employees participate in CPD.

There are various definitions of what comprises CPD, ranging from attendance at seminars or lectures to private structured reading. Definitions by The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) in its Rules of Conduct (RICS, 2004) are more detailed than CIOB definitions (CIOB, 2004). How CPD is measured varies; some institutions stipulate a minimum requirement in time e.g. RICS require sixty hours over three years with a minimum of ten hours in every year, whilst CIOB state that compliance does not require a set amount of hours but recommends approximately thirty hours per year.

There are many initiatives to promote the availability of CPD. Commercial e-learning packages e.g. cpdconstruction.com (2004) have been established in recognition of the difficulty that many professionals have in travelling to and attending more formal methods of CPD. Also, the Television Education Network (TEN, 2004) caters for the same type of audience, and it can be combined with a distance learning qualification (e.g. SHU, 2004).

The Construction Industry Council (CIC, 2004), supported by funds from the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), have established a web based data base which brings together information about all CPD events that are being held by professional institutions, universities, Constructing Excellence etc. People seeking CPD can search the data base by topic and post code to determine relevant local availability.

CIOB members are 'obliged' to undertake CPD under rule 13 of the Rules and Regulations of Professional Conduct. Policing CPD is a difficult issue: institutions do not have the resources to check all members. However, CIOB have recently launched an initiative where they are asking a sample of members to justify their CPD. The aim will be to bring members who are not doing sufficient CPD 'into compliance'. If members refuse there may be the possibility of disciplinary proceedings. Whether professional institutions would be prepared to ultimately expel members remains to be seen. But a significant movement in the accountancy profession is that from January 2005, CPD for members of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA, 2004) is 'mandatory'. Further, a survey by Echelon (2004) found that 85% of professional institutions intend to make CPD mandatory within the next five years. Measured against accountancy, there is some progress to be made by construction professional institutions; the recently formed Institute of Continuing Professional Development (InstCPD, 2004) have as one of its objectives, encouragement of professions to examine their CPD requirements.

## **1.5 Students**

Getting students involved in professional institution activity is increasingly difficult. Some 'full-time' students have 'part-time' jobs of more than forty hours per week. Part-time students are under pressure in the workplace. Mature students have to balance work and study with family commitments. It is difficult to ask students to undertake any extra-curricula activity that does not contribute towards their assessment, and indeed such activity may take valuable time that can otherwise have been spent on assessed work.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

There are eighteen professional institutions that are members of the Construction Industry Council (CIC, 2003). These professional institutions have an approximate total membership of 500 000, however many individuals are members of more than one professional body, therefore some double-counting applies. Grades of membership range from the most junior (usually termed student member), to the most senior (usually termed fellow). The population may be considered segmented – 'active' and 'non-active' members. The sample used for this study was membership of CIOB Greater Manchester Branch. There were approximately 1 600 members. A questionnaire was distributed to all members in summer 2003. The views of 'active' members are canvassed at local seminars, but it was felt that the questionnaire was the most appropriate method to obtain data from some of the 'non-active' members. 162 replies were received, representing a response rate of 10%. This is out of line with response rates normally expected in postal surveys, and although valuable data is obtained, care must be taken not to infer that the results represent the views of the whole population. The stated objectives of the questionnaire were to (i) determine whether member needs are being met, and (ii) to identify any areas where better service is possible.

There were sixteen questions in total. Ten questions were 'closed', asking respondents to select one from a choice of five answers. These related to the convenience and

appropriateness of CPD events. Descriptive statistics were compiled from the results and inferences made, a summary of which is given in 3.1 below. There were six open questions which invited members to respond in their 'own words'. These questions were related to (i) why members do not attend events, (ii) communication, and (iii) improving services to members. Analysis of data from these questions is undertaken qualitatively. Labels are applied to each remark to tease out common themes. Content analysis or simple frequency counts are undertaken on each label. Deductions are made based on these frequencies and by referring back to each individual remark (Taylor and Bogden, 1998). Members who gave long qualitative statements are counted more than once. A summary of this qualitative analysis is given in 3.2 to 3.4 below.

### **3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

#### **3.1 Convenience and appropriateness of events**

CIOB Greater Manchester holds CPD events at a hotel on the outskirts of Manchester at 6.30 pm on a Tuesday evening. Its location is close to a motorway and car parking facilities are very good. It is judged that public transportation to the hotel is not good, but this is not raised by many members as an important issue. Most members felt the venue was convenient. Also, the events do not attract many student members, perhaps partly due to public transportation problems.

The 6.30 pm commencement time is accepted by most members as being convenient. However, some people thought this was too early, given that many staff leave sites at 5.30 pm. Most members come from work directly to the events; they do not go home first. A free buffet is provided at 6.30 pm, lectures start at 7.00 pm and aim to finish for 8.00 pm or shortly thereafter so that people can get home in good time.

There were a series of questions asking about the appropriateness of various Branch events. Technical lectures, safety lectures, legal lectures and site visits are all well received and thought appropriate. The Branch holds an annual dinner where on average 200 people attend. The objectives of the dinner are to raise the profile of CIOB and to give an opportunity for members to entertain their clients. The dinner was thought appropriate by only 25% of members.

Each year there is one women in construction social event, one five-a-side football competition and one bowls/social evening. These are thought appropriate by 25%, 15% and 23% of members respectively. Whilst these percentages are relatively low, the events themselves are well attended. The objective of the women in construction social is merely to minimize the feeling of isolation that is sometimes felt by women members, and to open the possibility for mentor/pastoral opportunities to develop. The five-a-side football and bowls/social evening are networking opportunities, and give members and their colleagues the chance to compete and relax in a non-construction and informal atmosphere.

The Branch has held a student quiz for many years, as part of a CIOB national event. Only 17% of members thought this event was appropriate to their needs. The response of students in Greater Manchester to this event has been very poor. Students seem very reluctant to commit time to any activity which is not connected to assessment in their programmes of study. In one year, the format was changed to make the game of pool the prominent activity, with free beer. Attendance was still disappointing.

### 3.2 Why members do not attend CPD events

*Table 1: if you never or rarely attend CPD events ‘briefly state why’ - analysis of responses*

	Label	Content analyses	Comments	Action
1	Timing of events	16	Fixed time of 6.30 pm and Tuesday evening is noted in earlier question as being convenient for 67% of people. However, this does not please everyone	Vary the evening of the week for events
2	Time, generally	14	CPD must not detract from responsibilities in the workplace or at home. It is hoped that employers will recognise the need for employees to be involved in CPD	Continue with CIOB profile raising initiatives.
3	Time, family	9		
4	Time, work	8		
5	Time, other study	3		
6	Interest	11	Need to ensure speaker topics are relevant and current	Use Branch funds to attract high quality speakers
7	Communication	9	Some members are not aware when events are running.	Communicate events at all opportunities using paper based and electronic means.
8	New member	8	New members are not aware of the extent of facilities available.	Personal invite to next CPD event for all new members. Committee members to welcome people as they arrive.
9	Location	6	One fixed location is not suitable for all members in a large conurbation	Hold events in other locations.
10	Travel	4	Some members are working in other areas of the UK	Publicise CIOB events in other branches
11	Retired	4	Retired members may be able to mentor younger members	Personal invites to social events possible
12	Stranger	3	Some members feel left out of informal group conversations during events	Committee members to ensure they ‘circulate’ as much as possible.
	Total	95		

Members were asked ‘how often do you attend CPD events?’ 30% of members advised that they never attended, and 30% rarely attended. The following question asked those people who never or rarely attended to ‘briefly state why’. Eighty-seven people gave a one or two line response. Labels and analysis, including points for action, are given in table 1.

Simple content analysis indicated that ‘time’ is the main problem. This will not be accepted by construction clients as a reason for low standards; initiatives to encourage and police CPD, not accepting time as a valid reason for non-compliance, need to come from the national headquarters of professional institutions.

### 3.3 Communication

Over the last three years, the Branch has published an annual newsletter. This is a ‘glossy’ publication. The printing costs of approximately £1000 are about 20% of headquarters’ grant; a relatively large sum. Members were asked about their interest in the articles in the newsletter and about ideas for other articles. Levels of interest were sought in six areas, and are reported in table 2; on the whole these responses can be considered satisfactory. Ideas for other articles are reported in table 3, and these can be actioned for subsequent publications.

*Table 2: levels of interest in articles in the annual newsletter*

		Percentage of people judging to be interesting or very interesting
1	Annual report	67%
2	Chair’s welcome	60%
3	CPD and social event report	76%
4	Annual dinner report	26%
5	News about people	77%
6	Editorial	74%

### 3.4 Improving services to members

Members were asked how the Branch can improve its services. Results are reported in tables 4a and 4b. Fourteen themes were identified. Communication with members is thought to be very important; it is a recurring theme in many parts of the survey. There were similar outcomes in a RICS survey of members (RICS, 2004a), and in the Brook Report (RICS, 2004b). Four Branches in CIOB Northern England jointly share a professional style joint activities diary/booklet. This absorbs a great deal of CIOB staff time, but the cost of publication is covered by advertisements. Some Branches pay for posting the diary from their own funds. Greater Manchester has been able to secure sponsorship in kind for posting costs from higher education institutions; the time, envelopes and postage are paid for by higher education institutions in return for their advertisement literature also being enclosed in the post packages. Members were asked ‘how often do you consult the activities diary?’ 43% of members referred to the diary sometimes, and 25% referred to it often or very often. It would therefore seem that the diary is worth the effort involved in its production.

*Table 3: ideas for other articles of interest for the annual newsletter*

	Label	Content analyses	Comments	Action
1	Industry news, including local projects	10	News required about some flagship projects and companies in the area	Seek author from industry
2	Technical articles including safety	8	Some members also perceive there are too few technical articles in Construction Manager	Seek author from HSE and BRE. Seek permission to reprint articles from other publications.
3	Egan type news	4	Constantly changing environment	Seek author from Constructing Excellence
4	People news including new members	4	Recognition that construction is a people industry, and people enjoy reading about former colleagues	Members to be invited to write short articles
5	Jobs, salaries	3	In a transient industry members enjoy/need to read about other opportunities	Seek author from Hays Montrose
6	Student initiatives	1	Members should be encouraged to be interested in what our students are doing	Seek student author
7	Others	2		
8	Total	32		

The Branch web pages are accessible by navigating through CIOB headquarters web page. Members were asked ‘how often do you consult the Branch web pages?’ 30% of members did not access the page at all, and 30% rarely accessed it. The page is clearly worth its while given that the balance of 40% does use the page; if the quality of information can be improved there is the opportunity to increase its use still further.

The Branch has subsequently issued a ‘communication’ plan, indicating the type and timing of communication with members during the year. To avoid overload, a ‘pull down as you need it’, rather than ‘push everything at you approach’, as advocated by Brook (RICS, 2004b), has been adopted.



*Table 4a: How can the Branch improve its services to you?*

	Label	Content analyses	Comments	Action
1	Communications	16	Many members comment that they are not aware of CPD events	Need to establish strategy; examine the number of effective communication opportunities with members.
2	Positive comments	15	Some members are very supportive and appreciative of work undertaken by the Branch	Branch needs to keep moving forward
3	Location	9	One fixed location is not suitable for all members in a large conurbation, as noted in table 1	Hold events in other locations
4	Quality events/interest	9	Events where representatives from companies merely sell their products are discouraged by some	Branch to consider alternative speakers, paid if necessary – but there is a place for both types
5	Timing	6	Be mindful that some members find it easy to allocate a regular slot in their diary for events	Vary the evening of the week for events
6	More events	6	In 2002/03 there were eight CPD events. There is a demand for more	More events required
7	Membership progression	4	Members need guidance about how to progress their level of membership to more senior grades	CPD event to be held specifically to cater for this need. Similar event has been poorly attended in the past – need better publicity.
8	Architect/QS/management	3	More lectures required in these subject areas, rather than just ‘technical’ lectures	Broad ‘church’ of membership – action to be considered alongside 4 and 6 above.
9	Students	2	Need to encourage students into membership and to take part in institute activities	All educational establishments to be visited. Aim some events so that they are suitable to all ‘levels’ of membership

*Table 4b: How can the Branch improve its services to you?*

	Label	Content analyses	Comments	Action
10	Member care	1	Some members are unsure about the best source of help for personal CIOB related problems	Committee member to be appointed to be 'first point' mentor for individual members as required
11	Time	1		CPD is obligatory
12	Football	1	Important social for younger members	Need to re-launch five-a-side with greater publicity
13	Industry	1	More industry input to all events	Request industry members to come forward to help
14	Food	1	Increase budget if necessary	Quality of buffets to be monitored
	Total	75		

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The major issues that arise are: (i) communication to members, (ii) accessibility to CPD, (iii) quality, type and quantity of CPD. Many points for action are noted in the analysis of the survey, and have been reported back to members in a newsletter (CIOB, 2004).

Electronic, paper and personal communication methods need to be improved, and channelled to members through a focussed plan.

CPD is an important issue for society. It is argued in all sectors that professionals can not act on behalf of clients or the general public without some evidence that they do CPD. Companies facing litigation need to demonstrate that their professional teams are up-to-date; otherwise they maybe guilty of negligence. There is a reluctance by some individuals to participate in CPD, and some members who do do it, resist presenting formal evidence to their professional body (CIOB, 2005). Action is required on two fronts; first by professional institutions to improve CPD provision and educate/police members, and secondly by members who need to be more proactive in fulfilling their responsibilities. It is hoped that actions being taken to make CPD 'mandatory' in other disciplines will permeate their way into construction.

There is a challenge for all to stop 'time' being used as defence for not doing CPD. Government quality of life measures recognise the need for rest, play, time with family etc. Individuals need to strike the work-life balance carefully, and may need help from employers to do CPD during 'normal working hours'.

The need to substantiate performance of Branches to members is also important. There maybe a danger that judgements about performance are merely subjective, and lack any objective measures that can be used to compare outputs from year to year. Key performance indicators may have their critics; they can place unwelcome pressure on already overworked managers, and their overuse can detract from the business of getting the job done. However, they are pervasive, and in the same way that they are used by government and businesses they should be used by professional institutions.

Indicators are used in other voluntary and charitable sectors (e.g. Charities Commission, CC, 2004), and they are used at a national level by construction professional institutions (e.g. in pursuance of an objective to increase its profile, the RICS, 2004c, has ‘counted’ that it is the most often quoted body in the UK media). In a national context, CIOB acknowledge (2004) there is a need to ‘investigate appropriate KPIs with a view to identifying those that are most suitable to delivering objectives’. It is recommended that indicators are developed to embrace Branch activities. If they are developed at national level they can be used to compare activity between Branches in the same year, and also to compare the performance of a Branch against itself over a period of years.

## 5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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For its part CIOB Greater Manchester Branch has taken steps to action items requiring attention in this paper, and will revisit them to assess its performance in the future.

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